

King Probe Questions 1st Witness

Charles Stephens, a resident of the rooming house near the Lorraine Motel where Dr. Martin Luther King was killed April 4, 1968, was the first witness to be questioned in Memphis today by officials of the House Assassination Committee.

Stephens told investigators anyone inside the rooming house could get out through the back door, but, because of a lock, no one outside could get into the rooming house through the back door.

Stephens was overheard to describe to an investigator what he was doing the day of the death of Dr. King, when he heard a

noise in the bathroom that sounded like a rifle shot and later saw a man flee the room. A cab driver who had returned Stephens to the rooming house shortly before the slaying had told police and FBI agents that Stephens was drunk.

Federal court officials said they understood that some 20 witnesses were to be interviewed today and depositions taken.

No one with the committee, in keeping with their recent policy of not commenting to the press about their probe, would either confirm or deny what they were doing in Memphis.

James Earl Ray, now in a federal prison in St. Louis, pleaded guilty to the slaying of King, pleading guilty to the shooting. Officials said Ray was fired from a back bathroom window at the rooming house with a high power rifle as he stood on the second floor looking outside his motel room at the Lorraine.

The questioning was going on in Room 498 of the Federal Office Building. There was no list of witnesses. Sources said the witnesses are being questioned for specific times during the day.